

## Work begins on Arizona's Historic Soldier's Cemetery



(Sierra Vista) – Work has begun on a unique “cemetery within a cemetery” at the Southern Arizona Veterans’ Memorial Cemetery in Sierra Vista, Arizona. It’s all in preparation for a special military funeral for about 57 soldiers who served in the Arizona Territory from 1862 to 1881.

Originally buried in the military cemetery that served Tucson’s Fort Lowell during the Indian Wars, the remains were uncovered two years ago when work began on a new county courts complex in downtown Tucson. During the excavation, some soldier’s remains — along with a few full skeletons —were discovered.

Many of the remains are from soldiers who were part of the California Column, a 2,300 man brigade that marched into the territory from California in the spring of 1862. Their mission was to confront and drive out Confederate troops who controlled the southern part of what is now Arizona and New Mexico. Troops from the California Column occupied Tucson on 20 May 1862 and various

California units were stationed there until April 1866. Other remains represent the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry regiments, as well as the 8<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, and 32<sup>nd</sup> U.S. Infantry who served at Fort Lowell during the late 1860s to the 1880s.

The Arizona Department of Veterans' Services was approached to determine whether their Sierra Vista cemetery would be willing to offer the troops a final resting place.

"It's only right that these troops receive the permanent burial they deserve," says Arizona Department of Veterans' Services Director Joey Strickland. "I can think of no better way to honor these soldiers."

Work is underway to construct a 19<sup>th</sup> century style military cemetery within the Southern Arizona Veterans' Memorial Cemetery. The historic cemetery will have a stone and iron wall similar to the old cemetery found within nearby Fort Huachuca. The VA is providing period headstones for the troopers and cemetery officials plan to erect a monument describing what life was like for soldiers in Arizona during the Indian Wars. In May, the troopers will be laid to rest with full military honors for what is hoped to be the last time — a stone's throw away from Fort Huachuca, the oldest operating Army post in Arizona.